

Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor John Leahy and Members of the Lowell School Committee
From: Dr. Joel D. Boyd, Superintendent of Schools
Date: October 2, 2020
RE: Districtwide Goals and 2020-2021 Key Performance Indicators

Below, please find the district's organizational goals and recommended key performance indicators for the current school year, SY2020-2021. I am also including a brief summary of progress achieved during the prior year, SY2019-2020, in relation to the year 1 goals that were presented to the School Committee in August 2019. The districtwide goals for this current academic year build on last year's work and are outlined within the District's overarching strategic plan, which was formally adopted by the School Committee in May 2020. The District's strategic plan was adapted, prior to adoption, into a 1+4 year strategic plan with organizational focus areas for 2020-2021 that account for the unprecedented academic, operational and financial challenges and uncertainty of the COVID-19 global health crisis.

Progress on Year 1 Goals – July 2019 to July 2020

The 2019-2020 school year was a year marked by two distinct periods, including (1) a period of significant change and progress that generated important momentum in favor of large-scale and long-term improvement across the system from July through March and (2) a rapid redesign of every aspect of the district's core and ancillary services in the spring in response to the statewide COVID-19 shutdown of in-person learning for the remainder of the academic year.

SY2019-2020 Goals (originally presented to the School Committee on August 21, 2019)

1. **Improve academics and student achievement at every school site.** From the outset of the 2019-2020 school year, we defined teaching and learning as the core of our work and organized all of the District's resources around supporting the interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. We developed a model of differentiated autonomy to provide schools with the support they needed when they needed it while recognizing that the people closest to our students – teachers, parents, principals and support staff – were best positioned to make school-based decisions on behalf of our students. As part of this systemic redesign, we implemented the district's first comprehensive approach to turning around seven chronically underperforming schools through a model of targeted, on-site support and progress monitoring (*Renaissance Network*). At the secondary level, we launched the District's first ever Early College in partnership with Middlesex Community College and Project Learn, enabling Lowell High School students to earn a full year of college credits prior to graduation (*Lowell Early College*). For early learners, we were actively progressing toward the launch of a feasibility study for increasing the number of high quality preK seats in collaboration with our community partners at the time of the sudden school closure. Overall, from September to March prior to the closure, we were tracking important progress in the engagement levels of our students when compared to the same time period of the prior year with districtwide increases in average daily attendance (93% to 95%) and reductions in student suspensions (3,636 to 2,237). During the statewide stay-at-home orders, we shifted the focus of our academic services and completely redesigned our academic programming to include a combination of online, virtual learning, and teacher-directed remote learning based on centrally-designed, grade-appropriate weekly work packets. LPS distributed over 5,000 chromebooks to families in need in the spring and established drive through "tech tents" to provide outdoor, COVID compliant tech support to families through the duration of the state-required remote learning period. And through our scenario-based budgeting process, we readied the district for the likelihood of continued districtwide remote learning by improving the ratio of mobile devices to students from 1:3 in SY19/20 to 1:1 in SY20/21.

2. Improve operational efficiency across the system. In 2019, we achieved significant progress in laying the operational groundwork on our agenda to improve racial and class equity across the system. We reorganized the district's central administration to more optimally align our centralized service delivery model with the support needs of schools and families, and appointed the most diverse executive leadership team in recent district history. Through the fall and winter prior to the COVID closure, we overhauled the school budgeting process to increase equity and transparency in resource allocation through a Fair Student Funding model, a first-of-its-kind redesign for Lowell based on nationwide best practices. In addition, overall staff recruitment and districtwide hiring practices were improved through a concerted effort to identify and eliminate race-based employment barriers, resulting in 63% of all central office hires in FY20 identifying as people of color. And our newly-created Office of Educational Equity and Community Empowerment led the development of a locally-based, teacher recruitment and retention program to increase the number of teachers of color in district schools and cultivate leadership opportunities for current diverse teaching staff (*Diversifying Teacher Leaders Initiative*). Moving into the closure, as the fiscal impact on the state began to mount, we engaged in a scenario-based budgeting process that enabled the District to navigate the uncertainty of the state's economic environment, including an unprecedented requirement to plan for month-to-month budgets and the need to account for significant increased costs facing the District, while still maintaining a \$2 million increase in school-based budgets for the next fiscal year.

3. Ensure that every school is safe and welcoming to every student and every family, every day. Our focus during the prior academic year within goal number 3 related to both the physical safety of our facilities and ensuring that the climate within our schools supported and leveraged the diversity of our student body. The security and emergency preparedness of each facility was improved through an internally-developed district-wide school safety audit protocol. And to prioritize addressing the social emotional needs of our students, the district established a new position of Social-Emotional Learning Coordinator to focus explicitly on developing and implementing an SEL curriculum and training district-wide. We also began the process of elevating student voice by setting the foundation for the district's first Student Advisory Council with representation from a diverse, cross-section of secondary students. The *Lowell Student Advisory Council/LSAC*, which will be facilitated centrally, will begin informing district-level decision-making starting in SY20/21. To further support inclusivity within our schools, the District established a team of centralized, bilingual family liaisons, with representation from each of the District's high frequency language populations and developed a language access plan which included an expansion of the language line and translation and interpretation services. As we shifted into the districtwide response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the goal of ensuring safety at every school site was redefined as we closed our physical buildings and shifted nearly the entire workforce to remote work. As one important example of this required and significant shift, in March, to ensure food security for the District's vulnerable populations during the statewide shutdown, we completely redesigned our cafeteria services around grab-and-go meal sites, serving over 500,000 meals to families in need during just the first three months of school closure.

4. Increase community engagement and empower families as partners in the educational process. As a public school system, the district's long-term success is dependent on public support, community engagement and parental involvement. The District's overarching strategic plan was developed during the 2019-2020 academic year with input that was accumulated through hundreds of stakeholder meetings, including nearly 60 listening sessions with staff, over 40 gatherings with external partners and community representatives, and 100 school visits in the first 100 school days. Prior to the closure, we implemented the District's first ever School Site Council summit with over 100 participants, and expanded parental involvement in school-based budgeting with more families than ever before participating in the spring budget process. And to increase access to district information for families and community partners across the city, we expanded our social media presence, increasing the frequency of new posts to the district's accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter from less than 10 per month to more than 50 per month and

increasing the number of total followers across platforms by 43% from SY18/19 to SY19/20. In January, the district embarked on a community-led process to strengthen our understanding of each community's expectations, hopes, dreams and definition of "success" for our students, which ultimately will result in a co-created vision for how our public education system can develop the skills, mindsets and competencies of our students through their educational experience (*Portrait of a Graduate*). The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting shift to remote learning necessitated an even greater focus on community engagement as the home-school partnership, like everything else, took on a new meaning. Leading up to and through our announced closure, regular updates were provided to families via phone, email and social media. We designed a dedicated webpage to house COVID-specific resources for families and launched an online registration process to facilitate the enrollment of over 2,000 new students to the district during MA's stay-at-home orders in the spring. While there is much work to do as we continue to adapt to and support the needs of families through this shift, as an organization, we are committed to reflecting on our approach and evolving our systems to further increase the levels of community engagement.

2020-2021 Districtwide Goals and Key Performance Indicators

In accordance with the School Committee's adopted 5-year (4+1) strategic plan, the above four goals as well as the defined COVID-19 focus areas - *Physical Safety, Mental Health, Fiscal Prudence and Organizational Flexibility* - will continue to guide our work in SY2020-2021. As a reference, I am attaching relevant pull-outs from the strategic plan, which highlight the relationship of these goals and focus areas to our long-term strategy for district-wide improvement (see figures 1 and 2). Below, please also find recommended key performance indicators for the Committee's review and feedback which will be utilized throughout the course of the year to monitor progress and determine support needs at the district and school level in each goal area (see figure 3).

Figure 1: 5-year District Strategy and Priorities

<p>Core Beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high-quality education is a fundamental civil right of every child. • Teaching and Learning is the core of our work. • Parents are our partners. • Sustainable school improvement requires hard and steady work over time. • Every adult in the system is accountable for the success of all students; the entire community is responsible for their success. 	<p>Fundamental Commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate the racial, ethnic and linguistic achievement and opportunity gaps among all students. • Provide equitable funding and resources among the district's diverse schools. • Engage all families with courtesy, dignity, respect and cultural understanding.
<p>Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employing differentiated levels of autonomy. • Implementing systemic and instructional alignment. • Empowering students and families through choice. • Ensuring reciprocal accountability by all stakeholders. 	<p>Strategic Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing access to early learning opportunities. • Increasing access to high-performing seats. • Aligning secondary programming with post-secondary opportunities. • Leveraging the rich diversity of the Lowell community to serve the interests of LPS students.

Figure 2: 2020-2021 COVID-19 Organizational Focus Areas

<p>Physical Health: LPS facilities will undergo robust disinfectant sanitation and other enhanced cleaning tactics. Strict hygiene requirements will be imposed at all grade levels. Logistical modifications will be made to account for any physical distancing strategies advised by public health officials.</p>	<p>Mental Wellness: LPS will prioritize trauma informed practices in anticipation of students' mental health challenges precipitated by or exacerbated by the crisis. School leaders will be advised on practices to support both staff and families experiencing anxiety related to the crisis. SEL support systems will continue to be emphasized for the purpose of ensuring students' educational needs continue to be met in the wake of the 2020 closure and amid ongoing uncertainty.</p>
<p>Fiscal Prudence: LPS will conduct itself with heightened cautiousness due to revenue uncertainties at both the state and municipal level. All investments will be scrutinized for implications regarding long-term goals and any basis for immediate urgency.</p>	<p>Maintaining Flexibility: LPS will employ strategies to maintain programmatic and organizational flexibility both to meet the needs of students in the wake of the 2020 closures and to ensure maximum adaptability to logistical challenges and/or additional disruptions during the 2020 - 2021 school year.</p>

Figure 3: 2020-2021 Organizational Goals and Key Performance Indicators

[All KPIs will be monitored for continuous progress overall as well as progress in narrowing gaps among LPS' diverse populations in accordance with the District's fundamental commitments to equity]

<p>Academics and Student Achievement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On-Track to Graduation. Credit attainment monitored quarterly through Aspen 2. Course Grades. Monitored quarterly through Aspen 3. Math and ELA Proficiency. Monitored three times through the IREADY assessment 4. Early Literacy. Monitored three times through the Fountas and Pinnell assessment 5. Student Discipline. Monitored monthly through Aspen 	<p>Operational Efficiency:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diversity Hiring. Monitored quarterly through internal tracking 2. Teacher Attendance. Monitored monthly through Aspen 3. Substitute Fill Rate. Monitored daily through AESOP 4. In-Person/Virtual Enrollment. Monitored quarterly through Aspen 5. PPE Stockpile. Monitored monthly through internal inventory tracking
<p>Safe and Welcoming Environment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Emotional Learning. Monitored three times through the <i>Devereux Students Strengths Assessment</i> 2. Student Attendance. Monitored daily through Aspen 3. Chronic Absenteeism. Monitored monthly through Aspen 4. Facility Safety. Monitored semi-annually through an internal audit protocol 5. Meal Distribution. Monitored weekly through internal tracking 	<p>Family and Community Engagement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community Satisfaction. Monitored semi-annually through an internally designed survey 2. Language Access. Monitored semi-annually through an internally designed survey 3. School-Site Council Participation. Monitored quarterly through internal tracking 4. Parent/Teacher Conference Participation. Monitored semi-annually through internal tracking